

בשורה *Besorah!*

The Wave Sheaf

Once again, it's the season of Shavuot; known in the second chapter of Acts as Pentecost. Shavuot does not have a specifically mentioned date in the Bible. Its appointment is bound up with Passover. The two holidays are mysteriously merged by counting seven full weeks, plus one day (50 days), *from the second day of Passover*. Very little is mentioned about this beginning, whereas much emphasis is put on its climax. However, Shavuot is the sum of all its parts and I believe we can glean much from looking at it as a whole, even if we only scratch the surface. The Feasts of the Lord are not just historical, they are prophetic.

The Wave Sheaf Offering

On the second day of Passover, a sheaf of barley was ceremonially cut down. Its grains totalled one ephah (or 3 seahs; 3 measures). The ephah in Scripture represents the whole person: spirit, soul and body. Many Biblical offerings included an ephah of flour along with the animal and other components (See Gen 18:6). In Luke 13:21, Jesus mentions a woman hiding leaven in 3 measures of meal, until the whole is leavened; surely a warning that sin, through false doctrine and deception, can affect every part of a person!

The sheaf was brought into the Temple and the grains carefully beaten off. They were

'parched' on a perforated pan so that the fire touched each grain. Next, the parched grain was winnowed. The remaining pure grain was then ground in a special mill and passed through a succession of 13 sieves. From the original ephah, only one omer (1/10th of an ephah) of the fine flour was taken, mixed with oil and frankincense and *then* only a handful was burned on the altar. All of this is what was referred to as 'the Wave Sheaf.' 'Waving' describes the sifting that symbolises testing and examination by the Lord. This ceremony began the 'Counting of the Omer'; the counting of the 7 full weeks plus one day, culminating in Shavuot.

So to recap: the process involved harvesting, threshing, parching and sifting an ephah of barley. An omer of it was taken, mixed with oil and frankincense and a final handful offered on the altar.

Barley, being the first grain to ripen, is very symbolic. The Hebrew word for 'firstfruits', regarding the 'wave sheaf' (Lev 23:10) is 'chief' or 'beginning' (ראשית), as in Gen. 1:1 ('in the beginning'). In contrast, the Hebrew word for 'firstfruits', referring to the two wave loaves on the 50th day (Lev 23:17) is בִּכּוּרִים - 'progeny' or 'firstborn.' Barley was a coarse grain and did not make the best bread, but it was cheaper than wheat, so it



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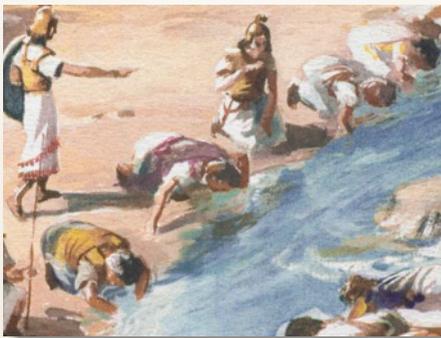
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was the staple of poor or 'common' people. So barley represents poor, common, weak, despised and insignificant people who are mightily used by God.

Gideon: Cut, Sifted, Refined and Diminished, then anointed and used

Gideon, when visited by the Lord, declared that his family was poor in Manasseh and he was least in his father's house. When Gideon brought his offering to the Angel of the Lord (Jud 6:15 -19), the unleavened cakes were 'of an ephah of flour.' Gideon was 'sifted' regarding his family's (and Israel's) idolatry when he was commanded to throw down the altar and grove of Baal! (Jud 6:25)

Later in the story, we read of Gideon eavesdropping on two of Israel's enemies and learning of a dream: 'Behold, I dreamed a dream, and, lo, a cake of barley bread tumbled into the host of Midian, and came unto a tent, and smote it that it fell, and overturned it, that the tent lay along. And his fellow answered and said, 'This *is* nothing else save the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel: *for* into his hand hath God delivered Midian and all the host.' (Jud 7: 13, 14)



As described above, only a handful of the ephah of 'wave sheaf' flour was finally used. Famously, Gideon's army had to be reduced twice (Ju 7:3-7). Of note is the second reduction. Judges 7:4 reads, 'The people *are* yet *too* many; bring them down unto the water, and I will try them for thee there.' The

verb 'try', here, means trial by fire, though they were tried by water! What are 300 men against vast armies which 'lay along in the valley like grasshoppers for multitude; and their camels without number, as the sand by the seaside for multitude.'? Yet the Lord delivered Midian into Gideon's hand!

Ruth:



The story of Ruth took place during the barley harvest (Ru 1:22). We know that she was a Moabite. Moab was the enemy of Israel (Jud 3:28), idolatrous (1 Ki 11:33) and forbidden to enter into the congregation of the Lord to the tenth generation because of their cruelty to Israel (Deut 23:3).

Ruth's actions revealed a profound spiritual quality and not romantic fancy. Not only did she marry into a foreign family that had experienced hardship, famine and exile (the sons' names even expressed sickness and depression), but the tragedy increased with the deaths of Elimelech, Mahlon and Chilion! Yet Ruth was prepared to **forsake all**: '...Intreat me not to leave thee, *or* to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people *shall be* my people, and thy God my God: Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the LORD do so to me, and more also, *if ought* but death part thee and me.'

(Ru 1:16, 17) Ruth had no prospects, as a childless widow and a gentile member of a foreign nation, accompanying an older widow to an 'enemy' land. But she did this as a result

of faith in the God of Israel, as Boaz testifies: 'The LORD recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust.' (Ru 2:12)

Boaz (her 'redeemer') showed Ruth great kindness. He 'reach[ed] her parched corn' and commanded that 'handfuls of purpose' be left for her. 'So she gleaned in the field until even, and beat out that she had gleaned: and it was about an ephah of barley. And she took *it* up, and went into the city: and her mother in law saw what she had gleaned: and she brought forth, and gave to her that she had reserved after she was sufficed.' (Ru 2:14-18)

We now recognise the mention of parched corn, but of interest are the words 'reached' and 'handfuls of purpose.' This is the only time in the Bible that these Hebrew words are used. They suggest that if we lack anything, the Redeemer makes up the difference (See Rev 8:3). Ruth had nothing to give except her life, and even that measure looked scant ('*about* an ephah'). But with Boaz's help, it looks as though there was no lack. The result: progeny!

Barley and bread are connected to warfare

The dream of the cake of barley bread smashing the Midian tent is clear. Gideon is described in Hebrews 11:32-34, along with others as, 'out of weakness [were] made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.'

In the Song of Deborah (Jud 5:8) we read, 'They chose new gods; then *was* war in the gates: was there a shield or spear seen among forty thousand in Israel?' The phrase '*then was war in the gates*' in Hebrew is עז לחם שערים - literally, 'then was barley bread.' The Hebrew word for 'bread' is translated here as 'war'. It

was a woman – Yael – who killed the enemy captain Sisera; not Barak, nor the army (which makes sense of 'was there a shield or spear seen?').

When the 10 Spies brought an evil report about the land of Promise, Joshua and Caleb exhorted them by saying, '**they are bread for us.**' (Num 14:9)

We all know the story of Jesus feeding 5,000 people with the five barley loaves and two fishes, given by a small boy, in John 6.

All these did not gain victories or bear fruit by human ability or ingenuity! The Wave Sheaf speaks not only of God's sanctifying and purifying but ultimately of intercession (incense) and anointing (oil), as seen in the coming of the Holy Spirit, which we *desperately* need for the work of God! A worker in Jewish mission wrote in 1904, 'If the modern Church was as full of the Holy Ghost as it is of worldliness, mission work among the Jewish people would be more successful.'

All this is summed up in Zech 4:6: 'Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the **LORD of hosts**' (signifying warfare). Jesus told his disciples to **wait** in Jerusalem for the promise of the Holy Spirit and said, 'Ye shall receive POWER when the Holy Spirit shall come upon you... and BE WITNESSES UNTO ME...' (Acts 1:4-8)

Counting the Omer *is also about waiting*. If only the Body of Messiah would wait upon the Lord to receive the power of the Holy Spirit – not just in creed, but indeed – then we would see more battles won and souls born. If we ever needed the true power of the Holy Spirit to see a harvest of souls, it surely must be now.

God bless and keep you, Chrissy Rodgers